

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2606

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 2368

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: REACTION TO REPORT ON MARCH 11 COUP

REF: LISBON 2329

SUMMARY: PPD AND PS REACTED CALMLY AND WITH SOME RELIEF TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE PRELIMINARY MARCH 11 COUP ATTEMPT REPORT. HAVING ANTICIPATED A POSSIBLE WORST CASE SITUATION WHERE THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY IMPLICATED IN THE PLOTTING AND BANNED, THEY WERE HAPPY TO GET OFF WITH A MILD SMEARING. EXPRESSO, HOWEVER, DID NOT FARE AS WELL. END SUMMARY.

1. SOCIALIST POSITION:

SOON AFTER THE PUBLICATION OF THE COUP REPORT THE SOCIALIST PARTY ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE CONGRATULATING THE INQUIRY COMMITTEE FOR THE SPEED WITH WHICH IT FINISHED ITS PRELIMINARY WORK AND FOR THE TIMING OF ITS PUBLICATION. THE PS STATEMENT COMMENTS THAT THE REPORT MAKES CLEAR THE MACHINATIONS OF REACTIONARY FORCES AGAINST ANTI-FASCIST FIGHTERS LIKE THEMSELVES. THE SOCIALISTS

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CLEARLY RELIEVED THAT THE REPORT DID NOT IMPLICATE THEIR TOP

LEADERS, MADE THE MOST OF THAT PART OF THE REPORT STATING MARIO SOARES AND SALGADO ZENHA WERE MARKED FOR ASSASSINATION.

2. PPD POSITION:

A PPD SPOKESMAN TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE PARTY DOES NOT PLAN TO MAKE A STATEMENT ON THE REPORT. ON THE WHOLE, THEY TERM IT "AN ANTI-CLIMAX," AND "WEAK." THEY CONSIDER THEY GOT OFF THE HOOK RELATIVELY PAINLESSLY, ALTHOUGH THEY OBJECT TO THE REFERENCE TO THEIR "SOCIALISM IN LIBERTY" THEME AS REACTIONARY. IN JEST, THE PPD SOURCE COMMENTED THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN GOOD FOR THE PARTY HAD THE REPORT CLAIMED THAT PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL SA CARNEIRO WAS MARKED FOR ASSASSINATION ALONG WITH SOARES. THE PPD DOES NOT EXPECT ITS ELECTORAL PROSPECTS TO BE AFFECTED BY THE REPORT'S CONCLUSIONS.

3. EXPRESSO'S POSITION:

EXPRESSO, PORTUGAL'S BEST AND MOST OUTSPOKEN NEWSPAPER, WAS HIT HARD. PHOTOCOPIES OF THE THREE EXPRESSO ARTICLES REPRODUCED IN THE REPORT ANNEXES APPEARED IN VIRTUALLY ALL LISBON NEWSPAPERS. EXPRESSO, IN RESPONSE, CALLED A NEWS CONFERENCE ON APRIL 23. DIRECTOR AND OWNER FRANCISCO BALSEMAO DEFENDED HIS PAPER, POINTING OUT THAT THE ARTICLES WHICH ALLEGEDLY CREATED THE CLIMATE FOR THE COUP ATTEMPT WERE QUITE NORMAL AND NEWSWORTHY ITEMS. DEPUTY DIRECTOR REBELO DE SOUSA SAID THAT PAPER WOULD "MAINTAIN ITS INDEPENDENCE, BUT NOT A BOURGEOISE INDEPENDENCE."

4. COMMENT: PS AND PPD GOT OFF LIGHTLY AND DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE SUFFERED MUCH, IF ANY, DAMAGE TO THEIR ELECTION CAMPAIGNS.

5. ATTACK ON EXPRESSO IS MORE OMINOUS.

EVEN BEFORE THE REPORT'S PUBLICATION AFM ATTACKS ON EXPRESSO HAD BEGUN TO TELL. THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN THE QUALITY AND DEPTH OF EXPRESSO REPORTING SINCE THE MARCH 11 COUP. OKUN

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